

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church and Campus Center, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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Submitted by Pastor Amy C Thoren



Grace and Peace in Christ! Having been at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church and Campus Center now just over a year, I recall my first impressions in the spring of 2015: *location location location!* On the edge of the main quad of the university, this spot could not be more ideal for a campus ministry. In fact, our small church building is currently rented out at different times of the week by four other ministries in the area. The President and CEO of the East Central Illinois Community Foundation calls our tiny corner of land, "that million dollar piece of property!"

With that perfect location comes the calling: to be a mission to this university and to accompany students in their faith formation and discernment of their own "*vocation, vocation, vocation*". To those ends, we added more regular weekly program last fall; in addition to Sunday morning worship and Christian education, free weekly dinner, choir rehearsal, and our regular faith and science conversations, our students requested a longer Bible study/discussion time they call Thursday Theology as well as a later-evening contemplative service around candlelight they call A Piece of Peace (a fusion between Compline and Taize). Our students were active this year on the quad itself with Reformation and alcohol awareness projects, participated in community service projects, welcomed homeless neighbors into bible study and worship, and provided a safe place for healthy parties on a huge campus known for excessive alcohol consumption. Our students are not only *ministered to*; they actively seek to know how God calls *them to minister* to those outside our doors.

After much discernment, I was called and installed as permanent pastor late winter this year, and I am honored to serve this community. Our leadership structure is unique. The Board of Trustees is made up primarily of non-members and responsible for property and finance. Its most pressing and exciting news, wholeheartedly supported by our students, is our new Accessibility Fund, designed to allow our current students (five students in wheelchairs have come through our doors in the past year; two of those are regularly active) to use our entire building. At this time, there is no access to our basement, which makes up nearly half our building and which houses the kitchen, and our bathrooms and ramp into the building are not up to code. With this university's excellent Paralympic training center, we believe making our building fully accessible is critical to the ministry we are called to do.

Our Church Council, comprised only of students, is eager to announce future spring break plans. Building on St. Andrews' connection with an organization called Just Hope in Nicaragua and recognizing that going overseas every year is financially restrictive, our Council decided on a three-year rotation. The first of each three, we will head overseas to Nicaragua with Just Hope --- the only exception being 2017, when our students will travel to Germany for the 500th year anniversary of Luther's Reformation and to learn about the German church's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. The second year, we will partner with the Good Samaritan Inn in Decatur, just 45 minutes from campus, where we spent a smashing spring break this year (2016) serving the hungry and putting our hands to the soil of urban gardens. The third of each three year rotation will be another domestic trip, always different. Our spring break goals include: growth in faith, service to God and neighbor, and justice-seeking education. It is a great joy and privilege to work with students whose faith calls them to grow, serve, and learn both globally and locally.

The ministry at St. Andrew's is exciting and vibrant! We are *very* grateful to professional photographer Darrell Hoemann who helped us create a Synod Assembly video report we can also use in regular promotional materials. Thanks also to our local congregations: Grace, Good Shepherd, St. Matthew's, Lutheran Church of Mahomet, and Christ in Monticello, for their support of this ministry. Thanks always goes to this synod for its gracious support and prayers. Of course, we are grateful to God for the many opportunities we are given every day to live the gift of faith in this university community.